

## ***FISH AND WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET***

**Meeting Date:** March 10, 2016

**Agenda Item:** Rumney Foothills Conservation Easement (R4)

**Division:** Wildlife

**Action Needed:** Endorsement

**Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation:** 15 Min

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### **Background:**

The Department is seeking endorsement to pursue a conservation easement(s) on 7,512 acres of intermountain foothill grassland habitat on two parcels (3,423 and 4,089 acres) within the Rumney Ranch near Cascade. The Rumney family is interested in selling a conservation easement to FWP to streamline and potentially expand their livestock operation and to conserve and possibly enhance wildlife habitat while maintaining public access, which is very important to the landowners. These foothill grasslands, which are intermixed with riparian and shrub habitats, are priority habitats for maintaining stable populations of elk, mule and white-tailed deer, antelope, sharp-tailed and forest grouse, furbearers and other native species, including several "Species of Concern." This mountain foothill native rangeland is some of the best big game winter range (and year round habitat) and sharp-tailed grouse habitat in the area. The two parcels cumulatively consist of 11.75 miles of native riparian creek habitats. All creeks are tributaries of the Missouri River. The Rumney Ranch is an excellent example of how ranching and wildlife can flourish.

### **Public Involvement Process & Results:**

FWP has not sought any public comment at this time. Upon endorsement from the Commission, FWP would conduct appropriate analysis, public review processes, and negotiations.

### **Alternatives and Analysis:**

*Preferred Alternative A:* This alternative is to purchase a conservation easement with primary funding from FWP's Habitat MT program. FWP would hold and monitor the conservation easement.

*Alternative B:* This is a "no action" alternative. This alternative would leave these critical intermountain foothill habitats open for possible conversion to other land uses which are not as compatible for wildlife, such as subdivision development. This is not likely to occur under the current ownership, but would remain a future possibility if left unprotected by a conservation easement.

### **Agency Recommendation & Rationale:**

The Department recommends endorsement by the Commission, which would allow FWP to proceed further with landowner negotiations and to conduct necessary analyses and public review processes. This project would conserve and protect important intermountain foothill habitats while providing perpetual public hunting, trapping, hiking and wildlife viewing access to the property.

### **Proposed Motion:**

I move the Commission endorse the Rumney Ranch Foothills Conservation Easement project, allowing FWP to proceed with further work on this project.